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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

OCTOBER 31 1980

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An artist and his armour

By Bernard Bergonzi

JEFFREY MEYERS:

The Enemy
A Biography of Wyndham Lewis
391pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£15.
0 7100 0514 8

JEFFREY MEYERS (Editor):

A Revaluation
276pp. Athlone Press. £13.50.
0 485 11193 4

TIMOTHY MATERER:

Vortex
Found, Eliot and Lewis
231pp. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. \$12.50.
0 8014 1225 0

FREDERIC JAMESON:

Fables of Aggression
Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist
190pp. University of California Press. £7.25.
0 520 03792 8

In the nineteen-twenties Wyndham Lewis presented himself to a philistine world as the Enemy. The enemy was duly returned. Twenty-three years after his death he is regarded with unenthusiastic respect as one of the "men of 1914" and a pioneer English modernist in art and letters; these are written about him and, as these books show, he is becoming the subject of academic studies. But people find it difficult to speak well of Lewis: he is thought of as a fascist, a racist, a sexist, a man whose opinions, delivered with brutal provocation, were repugnant to the liberal consensus. Nevertheless, extreme and uncompromising as his views seem, by some law of intellectual life, to attract passionately devoted followers. Accordingly, there are Poundians and Lewisites; and a small but articulate band of Lewisians, working hard to get due recognition for the Enemy. Still, it would be idle to pretend that he is very widely read, even if his novels are easier to obtain than they once were.

Some major modernist texts, once thought difficult and subversive, have been quite easily assimilated and incorporated into the general practice of novel studies, and subsequently canonized by academic syllabuses. Young readers can now respond very comfortably to, or, as they put it, "relate to," *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It is difficult to imagine them feeling in the same way about the hard, aggressive, seemingly inhuman comedy of *Tarr*, which was written at the same time as those novels. Last year *Enemy News*, the newsletter of the Wyndham Lewis Society, published an article reporting that a lecturer in English at University College, Lampeter, had found that his students reacted with "universal antipathy" to *The Revenge for Love*, a much more approachable novel than *Tarr*.

Jeffrey Meyers is not a Lewisite; indeed, his reservations about Lewis are wide and deep. But he has done the Enemy good service by writing his life and editing a volume of essays about him. The biography is solid and well documented, without being pointlessly massive or pedantically long. It is probably the material to be drawn on and aspects of Lewis's deliberately mystified life remain to be illuminated. But Mr Meyers provides the basic record of Lewis's personal story and his career as painter, novelist, critic and polemicist at large. He is particularly helpful in his account of Lewis's earliest years, showing what a tangled but potent set of influences he grew up with. His father was a wealthy, idle American dilettante, who had had his moment of glory fighting in the Civil War, and apart from a few moments of business did nothing much for the rest of his life. Lewis's mother was a British girl of Scots-Irish stock, who married at the age of sixteen. Percy Wyndham Lewis was born in 1882 on his father's yacht, when it was moored at Amherst, Nova Scotia; he was christened in Montreal, and throughout his life kept Canadian nationality, which enabled

him to serve as a war artist with the Canadian army during the First World War and to live freely in Canada during the Second.

Lewis spent the first six years of his life on the East Coast of the United States, in Maine and on Chesapeake Bay; there were no other children who survived. Then in 1888 the family moved to England. When Lewis was eleven his father ran off with a housemaid and never returned. Thereafter Lewis and his mother lived a peripatetic life of shabby-genteel poverty in and around London. There was always some money, though, received unrelentingly and in insufficient amounts from Lewis senior and the paternal family, and Lewis was given a conventional English middle-class education, culminating with two fairly unhappy years at Rugby. Between the ages of sixteen and nineteen he studied painting at the Slade and began a

pleasant human being, without many redeeming features. This is a hard statement, but the evidence is there: he was bullying, arrogant, ferociously selfish, paranoid, evasive, hyper-sensitive. The other men of 1914 were difficult personalities, certainly, but they had attractive qualities: Pound was celebrated for his generosity to fellow-artists; Eliot, however personally buttoned-up, did much service for public and intellectual life as editor, publisher and committee member; Joyce was monomaniac in the pursuit of his art, but an affectionate family man. There is no point in being moralistic, but Lewis was evidently a man with many, many problems: "They fuck you up, your mum and dad. They may not mean to, but they do."

All the same, he had loyal friends, some of whom he kept to the end of his life. Women seem to have been attracted throughout, though



"Self-portrait as a Tyro", by Wyndham Lewis. Lewis described the Tyro as an "elemental person". "These immense noxious brandishes, their appetites in their faces, lay bare their teeth in a valditory, inviting, or merely substantial laugh." See also page 1217, and the cover.

lifelong friendship with Augustus John. From 1901 to 1908 he was an art student on the Continent—based in Paris, where he lived the kind of life later rendered in *Tarr*—but also spending time in Brittany, Spain and Germany. During these years Lewis began writing as well as painting. He read Nietzsche and Dostoevsky and acquired an advanced European culture which gave him ideas and interests uncommon in young Englishmen of his generation. He also became an energetic and ruthless *coursur de jennes*.

He remained very close to his mother, who continued to support him as best she could and, without husband or other children, concentrated all her love on him. Lewis returned her devotion and wrote very frank letters to her from Paris, telling her about his current amours and intended seductions. For the present-day reader the flip phrases of social science hover, waiting to be invoked: "disturbed childhood... one-parent family... excessive dependence... inability to form mature relationships." Undoubtedly much of Lewis's later behaviour originated in those early experiences, and Frederic Jameson remarks in a footnote to his book that Lewis "cries out for a psychoanalysis of the quality of those years." But Mr Meyers does not attempt anything so ambitious, perhaps wisely, though near the beginning of his book he does quote Freud to the effect that "a man who has been the indigestible favourite of his mother keeps for life the feeling of a conqueror." Meyers's judicious, even-handed narrative does not conceal the fact that Lewis grew up to be an un-

pleasant human being, without many redeeming features. This is a hard statement, but the evidence is there: he was bullying, arrogant, ferociously selfish, paranoid, evasive, hyper-sensitive. The other men of 1914 were difficult personalities, certainly, but they had attractive qualities: Pound was celebrated for his generosity to fellow-artists; Eliot, however personally buttoned-up, did much service for public and intellectual life as editor, publisher and committee member; Joyce was monomaniac in the pursuit of his art, but an affectionate family man. There is no point in being moralistic, but Lewis was evidently a man with many, many problems: "They fuck you up, your mum and dad. They may not mean to, but they do."

Lewis may have been a conqueror where women were concerned, but his professional and social relations were liable to end disastrously; in particular, he had a compulsion to quarrel with people who might have helped him. One such early quarrel, which had lastingly bad results, was with Roger Fry, over decorations commissioned from the Omega Workshop in 1912. Meyers gives a detailed account of the quarrel and convinces me that Lewis was in the right; but as a result of it, Lewis earned the intense and undying opposition of the Bloomsbury group—who previously had been well disposed towards the young artist and writer—which certainly harmed his later reputation. His alienation from his contemporaries was extended by the satirical overkill of *The Apes of God*, and in the early 1930s he quarrelled with Charles Prentice, his editor at Chatto and Windus, who had been a keen admirer of Lewis's books and published many of them. Jeffrey Meyers sums up the decline in a melancholy paragraph:

The Apes of God was the first of a long series of tactical errors and personal disasters that oppressed Lewis during the 1930s. His book in praise of Hitler (1931) damaged his literary career in the same way that the quarrel with Fry hurt his artistic progress. These ill-advised works were followed by his break with Chatto and Windus in 1932, the withdrawal of three of his books between 1932 and 1936, the serious illness that plagued him from 1932 to 1937, his association with Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, his two unpopular Right-wing political tracts in 1936-37, the collection of his poems, *Unlabeled*, by the Royal Academy in 1938, and his ill-fated and ill-fated exile to North America in 1940. Lewis was indeed self-condemned; his greatest enemy was himself. Lewis's political opinions intensified the neglect of his literary works and made him one of the loneliest figures in the intellectual history of the thirties.

One of the irritants in Lewis's later years was being frequently confused with D. B. Wyndham Lewis, a comparatively light-weight Catholic humorist and biographer. In referring to this confusion Meyers falls into one himself, when he says that D. B. Wyndham Lewis wrote under the pseudonym of "Beauchamber"; in fact he called himself "Timothy Sly"; "Beauchamber" was J. B. Morton, another Catholic humorist and biographer.

Meyers's criticism of Lewis's books, whether fiction or polemic, is cautious and sensible but at the same time quietly dismissive of a good part of the oeuvre. He remarks, "For many of the imaginative, cleverest, most beautiful and well-born women in London were queuing up at Lewis's door to be treated, more or less, like dirt. One notes this, not without resentment, as a prevailing ontological problem in the relations between the sexes, and no doubt the kind of thing that gets discussed behind the closed doors of women's consciousness-raising groups. In 1918 Lewis met a young art-student called Anne Heskyns, with whom he lived—allowing for many affairs on the way—for the rest of his life, though they did not marry until 1930. Lewis always called her "Fraanna", derived from a German acquaintance's description of her as "Frau Anna". In his way he seems to have been devoted to her, though it was a very odd way, which involved keeping Fraanna as invisible as possible. Friends and regular visitors to Lewis's studio had no idea that he was married, and even to those who became aware of Fraanna's existence she was often no more than a pair of hands passing dishes through a serving hatch. Despite his earlier illegitimate progeny, Lewis refused to have any children by Fraanna, presumably because he would have had to recognize them. But there is a strange tenderness in certain portraits of his wife painted in the late 1930s, and, in a different way, in his fictional representations of her as Margot in *The Revenge for Love* and *Unlabeled*. Lewis explicitly disowns the ideology that had informed his earlier personal aesthetic: the commitment to aestheticism, extolling the hard carapace

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over the soft organic mess within. His person, René Harding, an evident projection of many of Lewis's own attitudes, is reduced to a "glacial shell of a man" in a fate that is a living death. I share Meyers's high opinion of this novel; but one has to point out that it is a work of traditional, quasi-autobiographical fictional realism. As always with Lewis, the prose is sharp, colourful and original. But the book marks a retreat from the innovating modernism of Lewis's early writing, exemplified in *The Wild Body*, *Enemy of the Stars* and *Tarr*.

Jeffrey Meyers economically reprints his discussion of *Self-Condemed* in the volume of essays on Lewis that he has edited. The title, *Wyndham Lewis: A Revolution*, is slightly misleading, since one cannot revalue what has not, in any systematic way, been valued. It is an uneven collection, with the Lewisites well represented. Meyers's introduction reflects his own uncertainties about Lewis, whom he refers to as "perhaps the fiercest and most stimulating intellectual force in modern English literature". If one is going to use superlatives one should have the courage to do without that pusillanimous "perhaps" and what, I wonder, would the author of *Western Man and the Diabolical Principle* and the *Diabolical Spectator* have made of "lively" and "stimulating" as terms of high praise? The finest essay is certainly John Holloway's "Machine and Puppet: a Comparative View", which engages,

with sensitivity and insight, in a comparison between Lewis's pictorial art and his fictional prose. Such comparisons between one art and another are difficult to do at all, and almost impossible to do convincingly; nevertheless, John Holloway shows common ground between the different media, in respect of Lewis's concern with machines and puppets; what interested Lewis, he argues, were two contrary movements: "That of the humanity into machine, and that of the puppet who, wonderfully, reanimates into humanity". Marshall McLuhan, who had befriended Lewis in Toronto, contributes a brief but suggestive note on Lewis's prose style. E. W. F. Tynan, writing on Lewis's philosophical influences, is informative and judicious about his dealings with Bergson, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, though he makes Lewis seem a much more conceptually coherent thinker than he ever appears to be on the page.

One of the most solid essays is by a French Lewis scholar, Bernard Louchet, on *The Wild Body*, discussing first, in a scholarly way, the various drafts and stages through which Lewis's early stories passed before they were made up into a volume; and then moving on to some quite acute critical reflections. Louchet asks, in passing, "out of what timorous superstition the critics have refused to contemplate the appropriateness of applying Freudian analysis to a notoriously complex, secretive and aggressive author?" The few of what Lewis

might have said about such a procedure is one possible though inadequate answer. Wendy Stallard Flory does in fact offer a psychological analysis of Lewis's early work, but it is a shaky edifice of speculation and analogy. One can see what prompted the attempt: Pound, Eliot and Lewis were three masters of modernism, all more or less American, who converged in London in 1914-15 and were associated with *Blasphemy*; it must surely follow that they had much in common and that the pattern of shared beliefs could profitably be explicated. It is true that the vortex is a potent emblem of modernist aspirations: a focus of intense energy that is self-contained, centripetal, non-linear, non-discursive. Historically there were good reasons for Pound and Lewis to adopt the vortex in 1914; by embodying circling, self-contained energy it enabled Lewis to define his movement in opposition to Futurism, which was fascinated by sheer speed and dynamic forward impetus. At the same time, Lewis was certainly influenced by Futurist ideas and rhetoric—the aggressive layout of *Blasphemy* was initiated from Apollinaire's manifesto, *L'Anti-Tradition Futuriste*—and may have been inspired by a sense of the sensibility of the Futurist, Giacomo Balla, called *Vortice*. The relations between Vorticism and Futurism have been clarified in some interesting articles, written in English and Italian, in a recent special issue, "Futurism/Vorticism", of the periodical *Quaderno* (No. 9), published by the Faculty of Letters of the University of Palermo. As a literary image the vortex has some distinguished antecedents. Marjorie Pryor quotes from Blake's *Milton*: "Everything has its Own Vortex", while Pound wrote in a very early poem, "Plains": "As one thing would draw through the node of things, back-sweeping to the vortex of the cone". Materer refers to a book known to have influenced Pound, Allen Upward's *The New World* (1908), which talks of thought flowing in funnels and watercourses and voices. There is other evidence, not quoted by Materer, which suggests that the idea was in the air in the early years of the century. John Davidson wrote in "The Testament of John Davidson" (1908), "while one designs, one is a vortex of all my thoughts", and T. S. Eliot referred in *The New Machine* (1911) to London as "a vortex of all my thoughts".

The problem with these analogical resemblances is that if they work, they work only in a weak and generalizing way, and do little to account for the complex of similarities and differences that Lewis and Pound were involved in during their years of collaboration. Eliot, as Materer has to admit, had little to do with Vorticist ideas and aims, even though, years later, he wrote in *Afterthoughts* "Whirlled in a vortex of thought, the world to me was a destructive force". The world to me was a vortex, unified by the central presence of Pound and proceeding by an associative method akin to that of the *Centos*. Materer's book is like Kenner's, and like Kenner's, it is a collection of bits and pieces, and some of his observations and discoveries are valuable. Materer shows, for instance, that Lewis's *Enemy of the Stars* has a much stronger claim to be called Vorticism than anything by Pound. There is a discussion of Vorticism painting and sculpture, which is adequately illustrated with reproductions. Materer correctly describes the feud between Lewis and Joyce: after Lewis's attacks in *Time and Western Man* Joyce took good-humoured revenge in *Finnegans Wake*, where Lewis is satirized as "Professor Jones". Joyce, Eliot and Pound were all commendably tolerant of the criticisms launched upon them by their old friend. Among items of unpublished extracts from Sophie Brausk's diary, showing Pound as he appeared to an unfriendly observer in pre-war London. Materer's book is carefully documented and makes extensive use of unpublished letters and manuscripts in American libraries. But he shows some startling lapses from scholarly rigour, particularly when he refers to an alleged meeting between Lewis and Pound in New York at the start of the Second World War. This meeting is as fictitious as Schiller's imagined encounter between Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stuart; Pound did visit America in the early summer of 1938 but had

been back in Italy for many weeks when Lewis arrived in New York; the dates can be easily verified. Since Lewis's letters and other documents also make it clear that he was not in New York at the time, the meeting is a fiction. The book is a collection of bits and pieces, and some of his observations and discoveries are valuable. Materer shows, for instance, that Lewis's *Enemy of the Stars* has a much stronger claim to be called Vorticism than anything by Pound. There is a discussion of Vorticism painting and sculpture, which is adequately illustrated with reproductions. Materer correctly describes the feud between Lewis and Joyce: after Lewis's attacks in *Time and Western Man* Joyce took good-humoured revenge in *Finnegans Wake*, where Lewis is satirized as "Professor Jones". Joyce, Eliot and Pound were all commendably tolerant of the criticisms launched upon them by their old friend. Among items of unpublished extracts from Sophie Brausk's diary, showing Pound as he appeared to an unfriendly observer in pre-war London. Materer's book is carefully documented and makes extensive use of unpublished letters and manuscripts in American libraries. But he shows some startling lapses from scholarly rigour, particularly when he refers to an alleged meeting between Lewis and Pound in New York at the start of the Second World War. This meeting is as fictitious as Schiller's imagined encounter between Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stuart; Pound did visit America in the early summer of 1938 but had

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Three drawings by Wyndham Lewis, of Ezra Pound, Rebecca West, and Julian Symonds. Lewis described his first meeting with Rebecca West as follows: "she was a dark young woman... who burst through the dining-room door (for she was late) like a thunderbolt." These pictures, as well as those reproduced on the cover and on page 1215, are taken from the catalogue to the exhibition of Lewis's work currently at the City of Manchester Art Galleries, until November 15 (128pp, with 167 illustrations, eight in colour, Lund Humphries in association with the City of Manchester Art Galleries, Paperback, £6.95, 0 85331 434 9). The catalogue, by Jane Furrington, is excellently documented and is introduced by Sir John Rothwell. It also contains a study, "What was Vorticism?" by Richard Cork, and a "Wyndham: an appreciation", by Omar S. Pooni. From Manchester the exhibition will move to Cardiff (until January, 1981), and from there to Edinburgh (until March).

was Tarr, the most characteristic monuments to the aristocratic-bohemian cosmopolitan multilingual European culture of that period, whose most substantial expression is *The Magic Mountain* of Thomas Mann. "The First World War destroyed that society and brought in a new libidinal apparatus, which tried Lewis in the direction of proto-fascism and satirical onslaughts on the established order.

Jameson reads Lewis as a great political writer, with an unsurpassed insight into the dehumanized culture of his time, and much preoccupied with how far a self is possible in the Age of Reification. He was a man of rich revolutionary potential, who could—and should—have been on the Left, but whose petty bourgeois insecurity made him anti-Marxist and deflected him to proto-fascism. There is nothing inherently impossible in this analysis, even though Lewis lacked the humanistic commitment of a starting point for leftist commitment, however tough or bloody-minded it becomes in practice. The label "fascist" has been applied, often in a simple abusive sense, to Pound, Eliot, Yeats and Lawrence; there seems to be no ground for calling Lewis at least a proto-fascist because of his aggressive and authoritarian temperament, his anti-liberal convictions, his sense of society as an inert mass or herd to be manipulated; and also because, unlike any of the other major English modernists, he had fought in the First World War, the matrix of fascism, which so deeply affected Céline and Drieu la Rochelle and Henry Williamson, not to mention Hitler and Mussolini and Mosley. Lewis's self-image, in his prodigiously productive phase of the late 1920s and early 1930s, contemptuously standing aloof from the soft, swirling mists of democratic society, which is in love with time and flux and the new world dominated by Jews, primitives, homosexuals and women. This image, of the archetypal Enemy, can easily be seen as an embodiment of fascist rhetoric and fascist iconography.

In a conventional reading of Lewis's career, like that of Jeffrey Meyers and the contributors to his book of essays, we have put up with the nasty idea of Lewis in order to take the good art that went with it, and then move on, with some relief, to the later, humanistic phase of his writing and painting. But Jameson reads Lewis through Althusserian spectacles, is not so soft or evasive;

his artistic integrity is to be conceived, not as something distinct from his regrettable ideological lapses (as when we admire his art in spite of his opinions), but rather in the very intransigence with which he makes himself the impersonal registering apparatus for forces which he whitewashes and liberal revisionism, in all their primal ugliness. If one believes that the primary—indeed the only—purpose of art is to reveal the unconscious, to expose conflicts and contradictions, and that this purpose has nothing at all to do with the artist's conscious aims, then such a view of Lewis is plausible. But if one believes

that there is much more to art than that, then Jameson's approach creates more difficulties than it resolves.

There is a rather sinister relish about his analysis, as though across the decades and the deep ideological divide, he finds a commendable affinity between Lewis's anti-humanism and Althusser's. His book, for all its coolness and toughness, is affected by the atmosphere of recent Marxist-structuralist thought, so oddly reminiscent of the era of alchemy and astrology, where ideology permeates every aspect of life, nothing is ever what it appears to be, and hidden but irresistible forces dominate human behaviour. At the same time, Jameson confirms my suspicion that Marxist-structuralism is such a perverse mode of discourse that no one can keep it up for long, and that when its practitioners' attention lapses they slip, despite themselves, into conventional literary criticism. Thus, Jameson says of *Self-Condemed*, then, unconscious material rises dangerously close to the surface. With that uncomfortable honesty so characteristic of him, Lewis here always seems on the point of blurting out the truth, both to himself and to us: Lewis's *Self-Condemed* is surely the closest he ever came to self-knowledge.

This is surely true; but it is strange to find such a judgment, rooted in Lewis's personal situation, being made by a critic whose method does not permit him to think in terms of selves and individuals; Jameson has no business to speak of "self-knowledge" and believing, as he writes elsewhere in the book, that ethics is a bourgeois mystification, he should not use such old-fashioned ethical terms as "honesty" and "truth". Stripping the mask from this critic, I perceive that beneath the sophisticated and learned deployment of Marxist, structuralist and psychoanalytic terms and concepts, there is one more magnificent intellectual and apocryphal tendency, lost in the Age of Reification: he actually uses phrases like "at this late hour in Western culture". Once again, it is closing time in the gardens of the West.

And yet, despite everything, *Fables of Aggression* contains some of the best criticism that anyone has ever written of Lewis. Put simply, it is evident that Jameson greatly admires Lewis, is excited and disturbed by his writing, and has erected an elaborate system of special pleading to justify what is in fact a personal and subjective adoration. He is, of course, right to try to read Lewis in a historical and political context as well as in a personal and psychological one, though the concept of "libidinal apparatus" is too abstract and cumbersome to take seriously. Fortunately, close to Lewis's texts and reading them acutely. Long ago Eliot remarked that there is no method, except to be very intelligent; Jameson's book suggests an amendment: it does not stop Lewis in a historical and political context as well as in a personal and psychological one, though the concept of "libidinal apparatus" is too abstract and cumbersome to take seriously. 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The opium of the people

By D. J. Enright

SHIVA NAIPAUL:
Black and White
215pp. Hamish Hamilton. £8.50.
0 241 10337 1

There was a kind of revolution that happened some decades ago, when the present reviewer was away in the rather far East. Consciousness, you might say, was raised, people discovered that they were persons, and whole herds of individualists came into being. It looked as if the Garden of Eden was about to be regained. That is, if you think of the Garden of Eden as consisting largely of huge pools into which happy narcissists could gaze *en masse*, with perhaps a few bombshells dotted about. Of course there was more to it than that: there was concern and compassion for the sick, the poor, the oppressed. The "Movement", a multifarious condition stretching from the most explicitly and radically assumed and political, could not have assumed the proportions it did without the participation of the decent, the kind, the idealistic. In any group phenomenon of any size good and evil rub together, cheek against jaw, interlocked to such an extent that it needs God's spies to tell the one from the other.

One good thing that might be said for the bad old days (which, as it happens, the present writer remembers rather better) was that we were not continually digging ourselves up to see how we were growing. Little credit is due to us on that score. We were too busy, too content, not to be busy-bodies; charity began (whereas often it needed to) at home; do-gooders were suspect, either nosy parkers or agents of "Them", the distant powers that were; or we lacked feeling, we took human casualties for granted, every street had its blot, its unmarried mother, its old witch; people were sent to prison because they had sought to rise above their station and (which was a disgrace) had been found out. Perhaps the opium of the people was really working—though what exactly was it? Hardly religion. We didn't expect life to be a bed of roses, a Garden of Eden. Or if we did, or would have liked it to be, then we lacked the encouragement of the media, for we couldn't go on TV to air our problems, whether pre-natal stress, transvestism, frigidity, ill luck or boredom. Ignorance was a kind of bliss, a very moderate one, for if you didn't know of possible remedies, then you thought less about the disease. It was a small world then. Or rather, it was a large one, but largely undocumented.

The foregoing passage of simplified social history is not entirely gratuitous. It serves as a background to the contemporary setting for his subject provided by Shiva Naipaul, who concentrates on the ludicrous or pathetic aspects of the "Movement", particularly those to be encountered in that New World, California. That is to say, the amalgam of best intentions and worst aspirations and lusts, ideas and low deals, honest outrage and prima donnas, the reform of society, the destruction of the same, militant pacifism, the amelioration of minorities, black panthers and white back-lashers, identity-seeking (or "Personal Growth"), feminism, care of the aged, "relevant" education for the young, ecology, macrobiotics, drugs, subversion and its twin, counter-subversion, Hare Krishna, Zen, bra-burning, ghetto-burning, student protest (there is mention of the cartoon showing a girl arriving at Berkeley wearing a black button: she didn't know what the button would be that semester), open marriage, civil liberties, the Filthy Speech Movement, Gestalt-O-Rama, communalism. Shiva Naipaul is right to set out the matter at some length, for (a) it is germane to the People's Temple and the self-massacre at Jonestown, (b) it is something of a relief from Jones-town and (c) it does out Jonestown, a subject rich in surmise but very poor in facts.

We must allow Shiva Naipaul his acerbic feelings, for few of us can easily keep his job as understated. It is no great wonder that far from feminists were "hairy arse" about

and the unfortunate whale features as just another sloppy or creepy fad. In Guyana he was teased by a person with a "narrow shiny face", "pinched lips", "spiky, yellowing teeth", and a voice that simultaneously rasped and wheedled, who wanted to buy his foreign currency. Shiva Naipaul was upset by "the completeness of his corruption, his degeneracy. He was an exhalation of the moral decay I could sense all around me". I am here reminded of foreign business men living in some style in South-East Asia and complaining at cocktail parties about the bribes they (or their companies) have to hand out, often to poorly paid minor officials, in the interests of honest trade. It is used to be the flag that trade followed. . . . But writers, especially if they happen to be novelists, are always glad of a symbol, and perhaps it was the teeth that did it. Possibly, like his brother V. S. Shiva Naipaul, occasionally confuses affronts to his sensibility with outrages against morality.

Yet, repelled as he (and most of us) must be by the very language of soul-saving and faith-healing, he makes valiant and, I would think, successful efforts to be fair to Jim Jones and the People's Temple. Jones must have possessed charisma, and he certainly provided a service: a blend of socialism, agricultural community work, harmony between old and young, and racial brotherhood (blacks and whites lived together, and eventually died together)—a service which gathered in, like some new Statue of Liberty, the tired, the poor, the wretched refuse of society, drug addicts, alcoholics, the lonely, the frightened, the refugees from established churches, and no doubt more pure idealists, and which did work, for a time. Even defectors from the cult spoke of the hope they had gained, the love they had learnt to give and to receive. "The power of love was just overwhelming. It just hit you as you walked through the door." And another, and another, earlier: "No more drugs, no more racism, no more rapes, no more prisons or jails".

It was after 1970, according to one witness, that things began to go wrong: drugs used to sedate troublesome residents, beatings for disobedient children (relayed over speakers for the encouragement of

others), semi-starvation, censorship of mail and telephone calls, church-burns with fiery arms posted to keep people in instead of out. The Temple had moved from Indianay to the "sylvan enclave" of Redwood Valley in California, then to San Francisco, and in 1974 to the Co-operative Socialist Republic of Guyana and to what Shiva Naipaul calls "a marriage made in heaven". It is alleged that the residents of Jonestown, though American citizens, had voted in the referendum that empowered Forbes Burnham to rewrite Guyana's constitution to his own liking. By now there had been attacks on the Temple in the American press, inspired by affidavits from defectors from the cult, and a body called the Concerned Relatives had come into being, led by a man whose daughter was one of Jim Jones's mistresses. For the Concerned Relatives Jones was a mixture of Hitler, Stalin and Satan. For Jones the Concerned Relatives were a gang of racists, terrorists, saboteurs, agents provocateurs, out to overthrow the successful anti-capitalist "co-operative lifestyle" of the People's Temple.

In November 1978 Congressman Leo Ryan led a delegation of Concerned Relatives and reporters to investigate the community. At the airstrip near Jonestown they were ambushed by Jones's men and several were killed, among them the Congresswoman. The game—which had never been a game—was up. Jones had prepared his flock for possible recourse to mass suicide: not the suicide of defeat and despair, but "an act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhuman world". Forthwith some 900 of his followers, adults and children, took or were helped to take cyanide mixed with Flavour-Aid—a potion prepared, we are told by a young doctor devoted to the cult, while Jones encouraged them in this new and final move in words as follows: "Lay down your life with dignity. Don't lay down with tears and agony. Stop this hysteria. This is not the way, for people who are socialist communists to die. We must die with some dignity." The marriage made in heaven was abruptly dissolved. In the place of their heroic socialist partners, the Guyanese government found them-

selves left with a lot of unwanted American corpses.

While Shiva Naipaul could have achieved greater narrative clarity had he dodged about rather than remains a mystery. The testimony in the case are as contradictory, diverse, as heaven and hell, or black and white, and by this account one of the witnesses is trustworthy beyond doubt. Only if the book had lived there could he have had to be more exhaustive and certain to tell the tale at all, Jones was fairly obviously paranoid in his extreme but, if one may put it that way, not without reason. The suggestion in radical circles towards the end he was being hypnotic or stupefying drugs by the CIA seems far-fetched. But even the truly concerned relatives played up exacerbating parts, and it is likely that the CIA had influenced demonstration of that agency's awful power to destroy what they are extensible striving to see, is a not dissimilar way the ones of the eco/ego movement could conceivably end in sinking the threatened whale. In 1978, and eventually, Jim Jones was a Humanitarian of the Year by the *Los Angeles Herald*. With heads like these around it is better to look for enemies, since what men do destroy they sometimes save. See times.

That *Black and White* is a depressing, alarming, depressing but, in part, a tribute to its author's acuity, fortitude and power of expression. It shows again how necessary belief is to humans, and how humans will believe anything, undergo almost anything, in order to preserve their belief. It shows yet again how dire beliefs can be in their effects on both their friends and their enemies; one man's life is another's death, if not his. A defector whose son died in Jonestown is reported as saying, at the end of it all, "People don't give up their dreams easily." Sometimes it became necessary for Leon in *The Winter's Tale*, to believe that his wife was unfaithful to him. She replied: "My life stands in the level of your dreams. Which file abruptly dissolved. In the place of their heroic socialist partners, the Guyanese government found them-

war Paul appealed to the British Government to encourage Anglo-Soviet trade so as to counteract German economic influence; he also repeatedly appealed for arms to enable him to resist Axis pressure. These appeals went unheeded. The authors quote Churchill's April 1939 note to the then Prime Minister Chamberlain warning him that as a result of Britain's invasion Greece and Yugoslavia "will be forced to make the best terms possible with Berlin and Rome". Churchill's own government was, therefore, in the authors' view, hardly justified in urging Paul to resist German pressure (and vilifying him when he did not succeed) while admitting its inability to help him.

In November, 1940, the British Foreign Office "advised Paul to abandon" Croatia (in effect—cede it to Hitler) and withdraw to "old Serbia". Paul refused and, seeing no way out, agreed to implement the Regency Council's unanimous decision to join the Tripartite Pact. Far from escaping from the Belgrade revolt in protest against the pact, King Peter was totally unaware of its having taken place and wept when forcibly separated from Paul and his family. Even if "for propaganda purposes the British government" put out that it was a strictly Yugoslav rebellion, the coup, according to the authors, was in fact engineered (at least partly) by the British SOE and probably MI6, and they quote the Defence Committee's official thanks to Dalton (head of SOE) for the part played by his organization in bringing about the coup d'état in Yugoslavia.

Moreover, the authors suggest, the generally accepted version that the coup contributed to the Allied victory by delaying Hitler's invasion of Russia is the reverse of the truth: it did not delay it, it facilitated it. Contrary to propaganda, Paul's agreement with the Axis forbade the passage of Axis troops through Yugoslavia, nor did he permit the transport through it of Axis war material.

It is difficult to say how seriously war-time allegations were taken in British official circles (though internal FO memoranda seem to suggest they were) nor how much of it was due to war psychosis. Certainly Paul, brother-in-law, the Duke of Kent, continued to write friendly letters to him in his Kenyan internment, the British King and Queen received him almost immediately after the war and he was never deprived of his Order of the Garter. Moreover, the Greek King, whom Paul was accused of having stabbed in the back, not only refused to accept this version of Paul's behaviour but, to the embarrassment of the British Ambassador, invited him in any of Greece when he was faced out of Yugoslavia after the coup. After the war Paul continued to be on friendly terms with King (by then ex-king) Peter of Yugoslavia until Peter's death in 1970. Paul died six years later at the age of 85.

Sir John Balfour (no relation to Neil Balfour), commenting in *The Times* after Paul's death on his personality and record as a statesman, referred to the "shabby behaviour" towards him of some people in this country who ought to have known better. This book does much to justify the bitterness of his remark.

Two poems by John Ashbery

The Songs We Know Best

Just like a shadow in an empty room
Like a breeze that's pointed from beyond the tomb
Just like a project of which no one tells—
Or didja really think that I was somebody else?

Your clothes and pantlegs lookin' out of shape
Shape of the body over which they drape
Body which has acted in so many scenes
But didja ever think of what that body means?

It is an organ and a vice to some
A necessary evil which we all must hum
To others an abstraction and a piece of meat
But when you're looking out you're in the driver's seat!

No man cares little about fleshy things
They fill him with a silence that spreads in rings
We wish to know more but we are never sated
No wonder some folks think the flesh is overrated!

The things we know not all got learned in school
Try to learn a new thing and you break the rule
Our knowledge isn't much it's just a small amount
But you feel it quick inside you when you're down for the count

You look at me and frown like I was out of place
I guess I never did much for the human race
Just hatched some schemes on paper that looked good at first
Sat around and watched until the bubble burst

And now you're lookin' good all up and down the line
Except for one thing you still have in mind
It's always there though often with a different face
It's the worm inside the jumping bean that makes it race

Too often when you thought you'd be showered with confetti
What they flung at you was a plate of hot spaghetti
You've put your fancy clothes and flashy gems in hock
Yet you pause before your father's door afraid to knock

Once you know the truth it tried to set you free
And still you stood transfixed just like an apple tree
The truth it came and went and left you in the lurch
And now you think you see it from your lofty perch

The others come and go they're just a dime a dozen
You react to them no more than to a distant cousin
Only a few people can touch your heart
And they too it seems have all gotten a false start

In twilight the city with its hills shines serene
And lets you make of it more than anything could mean
It's the same city by day that seems so crude and calm
You'll have to get to know it not just pump its arm

Even when that hugh sounded loud and clear
You knew it put an end to all your fear
To all that lying and the senseless mistakes
And now you've got it right and you know what it takes

Some day I'll look you up when we're both old and gray
And talk about those times we had so far away
How much it mattered then and how it matters still
Only things look so different when you've got a will

It's true that out of this misunderstanding could end
And men would greet each other like they'd found a friend
With lots of friends around there's no one to entice
And don't you think seduction isn't very nice?

It carries in this room against the painted wall
And hangs in folds of curtains when it's not there at all
It's woven in the flowers of the patterned spread
And lies and knows not what it thinks upon the bed

I wish to come to know you get to know you all
Let your belief in me and me in you stand tall
Just like a project of which no one tells—
Or do ya still think that I'm somebody else?

Or in My Throat

To the poet as a basement quilt, but perhaps
To some reader a latticework of regrets, through which
You can see the funny street, with the ends of cars and the dust,
The thing we always forget to put in. For him

The two ends were the same except that he was in one
Looking at the other, and all his grief stemmed from that;
There was no way of appreciating anything else, how polite
People were for instance, and the dream, reversed, became

A swift nightmare of starlight on frozen puddles in some
Dread waste. Yet you always hear
How they are coming along. Someone always has a letter
From one of them, asking to be remembered to the boys, and all.

That's why I quit and took up writing poetry instead.
It's clean, it's relaxing, it doesn't squirt juice all over
Something you were certain of a minute ago and now your own face
Is a stranger and no one can tell you it's true. Hey, stupid!

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A modern Oliver

By George Theiner

SAMUEL PISAR:
Of Blood and Hope
316pp. Cassell, £7.95.
0 304 30737 8

In the summer of 1975 Samuel Pisar was asked by President Giscard d'Estaing to accompany him on a pilgrimage to Auschwitz. There is a picture in *Of Blood and Hope* showing him, elegant and attentive, his beautiful wife at his side, as he listens to the speeches by the French President and the then Polish leader, Edward Gierak. He was only forty-six years old, yet already he had a long and distinguished career behind him: a graduate of Melbourne University with a law degree from Harvard and another from the Sorbonne, and a member of Gray's Inn, he had worked for the United States Administration under John Kennedy as well as for Unesco, had set up a highly successful international law practice specializing in Hollywood stars and large business concerns, and had played an important part in shaping America's policy of détente and economic cooperation with the Soviet Union. Five years previously he had published his first book, *Coexistence and Commerce*, which was received, as he puts it, "with astonishing acclaim".

A success story by any standards, even if Pisar had been born of well-to-do parents and had experienced a happy, uneventful childhood and adolescence. The circumstances under which he actually grew up, and his later "reincarnation" make this an extraordinary tale indeed.

Samuel—or Mula, as he was

known to family and friends—was born in the Polish town of Białystok, where his father started the first taxi service "with one Renault and one Chevrolet". His was a family of some standing, owning several houses, and it was proud of Leon, the grandfather, who had saved many Jews in the bloody pogrom of 1906 "when the city was still a part of the czarist empire". Being themselves Jewish, the Pisars were destined for annihilation. In 1939 Poland was invaded by Hitler's forces from the West and from the East, Białystok becoming part of the Soviet zone. For two years the family's fate was deferred; the Red Army happened to encounter Mula's father with his hands black with grease, as he was just mending a car, and he was thus taken for a member of the proletarian left. The year-old (or victim to "the poisonous seeds of Stalinist indoctrination" and, to the consternation of his father, even team of becoming a Red Air Force general. His more pragmatic mother wanted the family to follow her two brothers who had emigrated to Australia, or to go to the United States where they had other relatives. It was not to be.

The Nazi shock troops that entered Białystok wasted no time in implementing the Führer's racial plans. On the first Friday of the occupation, over a thousand Jews were herded into the Great Synagogue, which was then set aflame. The following Sabbath, hundreds of able-bodied men, among them my cousin Isaac, Grisha and Prol, were rounded up, lined up in a field, and cut down by machine-gun fire.

That, writes Pisar, inconspicuously the beginning. What follows is an all-too-familiar description of the horrors of ghetto and concentration camp, of cattle-truck transports and

gas chambers, as the Jewish boy from Białystok finds himself alone in a hostile world in which, to use the author's words, the unthinkable had become possible. While they are still in the ghetto in the slums of their native city, his father is caught by the Germans trying to help children escape to freedom and shot for his pains. When the time comes for the dreaded transport, his mother makes Mula put on long pants—he thus goes with the men, never to see her again. She, his little sister Frieda, and his grandmother perish in the Holocaust.

Pisar brings to his story a narrative skill and a sharpness of intellect which lifts the book above the general run of concentration-camp literature. He constantly switches from the appalling reality of the Nazi camps to the post-war years and to the present, reminding us of time and again that Stalin's gulag was an equally monstrous invention and that, unlike Hitler's, his heirs are still with us.

Young Mula survived his gruesome journey through the hell of Auschwitz, Mauthausen and Dachau, learning to use his wit and striking up a life-long friendship with his "camp brothers" Ben and Niko, that heroic "wild Dutchman" from Rotterdam, before being liberated by a black GI in a tank on whose white star instead of the hateful swastika. At the age of sixteen he was, by his own account and as a glance at his photographs confirm, a tough, hard-eyed "modern Oliver Twist", well versed in the rules of survival, and able to play his part in the shady black market deals which soon became a trouble with the American army authorities. Saved from the career of a juvenile delinquent by the well-known miraculous intervention of his young Parisian aunt, he is re-

deemed by the further kindnesses of his two Australian uncles, who provide him with a loving home and a good education, and set him on the road to America.

All this kindness seems to have rubbed off on its recipient. The reader would be hard put to it to find an unkind reference to any of the huge cast of characters who pass through the pages of this book—always excepting the brutal SS guards and the likes of Hitler, Stalin, Brezhnev and Idi Amin. Even those whom he does not see eye to eye with, such as Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski (at Harvard, Professor Harold Bernard had called them "Poles apart") or Solzhenitsyn, are given fair treatment by the author, who confesses to admiring the first and last-named despite considerable differences of opinion.

So much then in praise. What of criticism? That détente, trade relations and coexistence are good and (given the nuclear capability of the two superpowers) necessary things I have no doubt. Yet it does on occasion seem to me that Pisar is too willing to concede advantages of trade and technical know-how to the Soviet Union without adequate

guarantees of something in return—such as improved Soviet police force in the sphere of human rights. And there seems to be an inconsistency between his statement (made on an official visit to Kiev) of making his moving and courageous bid to visit Babi Yar) that "I was in Russia at the moment of the air-raid, in order to flee my country, they should have brought me to justice, because I have broken the law" and the account of the courageous exploit of a "commando raid in a boat through Greek and Turkish waters" in order to snatch Theodorakis and his two children from under the noses of the Greek Colonels after Pisar and others had successfully pleaded with them to save the life of the composer. Theodorakis and his wife, when civilised methods fail, are writers "one has to fall back on primitive instincts of attacking one man to authenticate one's fighters". If that is so, I fail to understand why Edward Kennedy and his friends should be treated as common criminals.

But I must not end on a dissent note. All in all, this story of a man's moral and spiritual redemption makes inspiring reading.

Opening the heart

By Patricia Craig

The Journals of Anais Nin
Volume 7, 1966-1974
Edited by Gunther Stuhlmann
416pp. 16 pages of illustrations.
Piper Owen, £9.95.
0 206 0568 7

Meeting Lawrence Durrell for the first time in a number of years, Anais Nin is struck by a certain coldness of spirit in the better-known writer. He "talks to me, but not out of feeling". This is the opposite of Miss Nin's own literary manner. Her Journals will certainly amuse no one (or only by inadvertence); and an excess of feeling nozes from every heartfelt comment. "I felt embraced by my own responsiveness." "They come with gifts made with their own hands, and we express tenderness and love." Of a piece of criticism which has pleased her, Miss Nin observes: "It opens the very heart of the world." We can understand her enthusiasm: "It is for the messy and throbbing herself."

Before the publication of the first volume of her Diaries in 1966, Anais Nin was known only as the friend of Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell, and the author of a number of sensitive and poetic novels. She suffered, of course, how could she not, from her own sensitive and poetic personality exposed to public scrutiny in the Diaries, but gained consolation from the heartening response which followed. Women all over the world were touched, moved, enthralled. In the seventh and final volume, five pages of excerpts from letters received by Miss Nin show the generous and sensitive response to the Diaries. "I turn to the Diary to beautify my life," "your writing reaches deep inside of me," "Through your words... I have come upon the thresholds of my soul." Did all this gratify Miss Nin's vanity? Not a bit of it. There was no ego in the Diary, there was only a voice which spoke for thousands, made links, bonds, friendships. There was no one self. We were all one, she assures her readers. Is she disingenuous? I think so. In the same letter received by Auden, she became her admirer. She sees herself as "a symbol of integrity and independence."

Occasionally, a natural resentment breaks through: "people only bring me their burdens." But the American (female) lives keeps the American (female) going. She writes to one of her admirers, "I have sent to Nin's publisher a cable bearing the dramatic message: 'Please tell Anais Nin I am going to commit suicide' (name and address included). Anyone who has read as far as p. 21 (where the incident is recounted) will know that a warm and tender friendship is about to 'flower'. Nin playfully dismisses the hysterical author of the telegram, 'my suicide'."

What is offered by Anais Nin is an antidote to the business and

brutality of contemporary life which denies the spiritual life and destroys intuition? Beyond this insight that liberation lies from within, a deep faith in psychoanalysis and an awareness of the power of dreams. She is not lucid. It is no wonder that her feminists, "man-hating" or at least political women lost passion with her passionate and often whimsical. Heckling is sometimes met at her lectures. "Dreams are lying," shouts one rude member of a university audience. Daring, however, Nin's dreams, which are fully recorded, are almost always revealing. She writes: "I perform domestic chores, on my knees frantically scrubbing my cleaning. On one occasion, in her sleep, she is transported to the top of a waterfall where she stands and looks down at the bottom. The water is dead, not a flicker of humor gets into the description of this absurd scene."

Swimming, as everyone knows, is a metaphor for sexual intercourse, another subject on which Miss Nin is a writer. Her physiological descriptions are not always accurate. In Volume 1 she gives the impression of a thick copulation involves a fluid (swimming again). As an eroticist she is no more persuasive than her friend Henry Miller. "I am off the activity of the conscious of his approach." "Lustful writing" was the term Lawrence Durrell applied to his works. Miss Nin makes it seem intolerably boring (or disavowing luminous) for a woman to write where "one bears" and "child-bearing" is mysteriously equated. "Feminine, indeed, have a special significance for this most feminine of writers. I do not believe that any woman can write without a 'woman' in her. It is a kind of harmony achieved during a moment of time, where 'woman' and 'other' writes. 'We gave birth to each other.' Mawkishness is not to be further."

Nin never hesitates to use a term: "the reading of books is itself the most beautiful education of all." Her literary compulsion is to affirm, affirm, affirm. Anything destructive she calls "harm". "War, bombs, and chaos, holdups, criminal revolution, so on, it is all a kind of revolution, a kind of chaos expressed. One often finds a kind of chaos in the life of her Florida prose is to make up a core of common sense and ideas, even when they are at her best as a travel writer. In Bali, for example, she writes: 'I am in Bali, looking down at my impressions which, without much refinement or pretension, are given over to the public and the private self. I am not inflated. When Anais Nin is not the salient quality of the atmosphere, it is the feeling of a woman who is suddenly and unexpectedly by her book. It is, of course, like the sincerity of a preacher or the eloquence of a television commentator, a

Between eros and thanatos

By Phyllis Grosskurth

NIGEL NICOLSON and JOANNE TRAUTMANN (Editors):
Leave the Letters Till We're Dead
The Letters of Virginia Woolf
Volume VI: 1936-1941
556pp. Hogarth Press, £15.
0 7012 0470 2

The publication of the sixth and final volume of Virginia Woolf's letters almost brings to completion the mausoleum erected to her memory by vigilant relatives, who have presided over the Family Romance through the ownership of the copyright of her letters, the publication of her biography, and through successive editions of her writings.

The cult that has grown around Virginia Woolf would be slightly less if it were not for her suicide. She is no longer a fallible woman, but a complex image constructed of woman, writer, suicide—an objectified symbol of our death instinct. The quality of her work has been confused with a deeply neurotic, rather frightening human being. Throughout these volumes we have witnessed the spectacle of an ego held in precarious balance between eros and thanatos, a spectacle which appeals to mankind's voyeuristic wish to see the other side of the final curtain. The final act might have been cathartic were it not for some grave problems raised by Nigel Nicolson in an appendix to this last volume.

Here he queries the assertions of both Leonard Woolf and Quentin Bell that Virginia Woolf's three suicide notes, one addressed to Vanessa, the other two to Leonard, were written on the same day, March 28, 1941. Nicolson argues the case that her suicide might have been premeditated by ten days, and suggests that the three letters were written on March 18, 23, and 28 respectively. His argument is plausible, although he admits that the contention "that the three letters were all written on the day of her suicide cannot be conclusively disproved". His unbusiness poses questions of rather disturbing proportions. A letter considered by Quentin Bell to be "the last of the three notes, Nicolson and his co-editor, Joanne Trautmann, believe to be the first; it is dated simply Tuesday, but his editors believe it to have been written on the 18th rather than on the 28th March."

Two reasons are given for their conclusion. First, they consider the strong possibility that Virginia Woolf attempted to commit suicide on the earlier date and had written to Leonard prior to this. It was written on the same-sized notepaper as the letter to Vanessa, dated Tuesday, which they interpret as March 23, a date advanced from the first sentence, "You can think how much I loved your letter," apparently referring to a letter from Vanessa of March 20. Both these notes were folded and put in blue envelopes.

The undated letter, however, was written on slightly smaller paper and was unfolded. The ink and the penmanship were identical, although on the undated letter the ink starts paler, as if it were priming dry and had to be replenished halfway through. These were the two letters supposedly found in the garden. The undated letter was left unfolded and unfolded in this garden. What evidence has Nicolson about the precise spot where the notes were found? And all by Leonard? Leonard, however, mentions only one in *The Journey Not the Arrival Matters*. The mystery deepens. The editors, however, do not tackle the thorny question of the contents of the letters. Each of the three attests to Leonard's total devotion, as if written in absorption of all guilt and responsibility that might be attributed to him.

In the Tuesday letter (dated 18 March, 1941, the editors), Virginia writes: "You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that to Vanessa she wrote: 'All I want to say is that Leonard has been so astonishingly good, every day always; I can imagine that anyone could have done more for me than he has.' We have been perfectly happy until the past few weeks, when this horror began. Will you assure him of this."

In her last letter to Leonard, the one which is specifically dated 28 March, 1941, she again assured him: "All I want to say is that until this disease came on we were perfectly happy. It was all due to you. No one could have been as good as you have been, from the very first day until now. Everyone knows that." Why did Quentin Bell not quote both letters in his biography? Surely it is the responsibility of a biographer to consider all the essential evidence. A reader might reasonably wonder, in view of this oversight, how many other letters have possibly been suppressed? Once started, the process of suspicion accelerates. Why, for example, does he say Virginia wrote one of the gayest and one of the most hilarious of her letters to Vanessa at the height of the Munich crisis. Unfortunately it is not a letter which can, at present, be published? Why, then, this tantalizing hint?

The final paragraph of Nicolson's introduction, which he has quoted in full:

Was this insanity? No, it was a combination of fantasy and fear. She would have recovered as she had before. She was not mad when she died. When Leonard wrote his garden letter on the final morning, March 28, 1941, he saw nothing in her behaviour to make him hesitate to leave her alone. Her handwriting, even of her last note, was firm and normal. But she feared madness, and the fear

Coroner's verdict, in the kindly formula of his profession, that she killed herself "while the balance of her mind was disturbed", but he meant by it more than the facts prove. Her suicide, Kenney has suggested in her careful analysis (*University of Toronto Quarterly*, Summer 1975), was her "last desperate act of free will". Many people who take their own lives do not choose to die, but are compelled by a mental illness. Virginia Woolf chose to die. It was not an insane or impulsive act, but premeditated. She died courageously on her own terms.

The editing of the Woolf letters has been meticulous, but the packaging has been a little too glossy. It is a startling oversight that Nicolson makes no reference to Roger Poole's important book, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (1978), which also argues the case for Virginia Woolf's sanity at the time of her death. Nicolson describes Susan Kenney's article as a "careful analysis". It is certainly that, but it is also brilliant and courageous. Kenney is not going to have any truck with sycophantic flattery, and her forthright argument is a welcome contrast to Nicolson's evasive reference to her analysis of Virginia's death.

She argues that while the Ouse was flooded and icy cold, it would have been difficult to drown in it. Though the river was dragged for several days, her body could not be found. It was thought to have been carried out to sea. Rumours circulated in the village that Leonard Woolf had done away with her and hidden the body, but these were stifled some weeks later when her body was found, badly decomposed, floating in the same spot where her hat and stick had been. Apparently it had all the time been wedged in some underwater debris. The coroner's verdict was suicide while the balance of her mind was disturbed. Leonard, however, thinks would have been a "careful analysis". It is certainly that, but it is also brilliant and courageous. Kenney is not going to have any truck with sycophantic flattery, and her forthright argument is a welcome contrast to Nicolson's evasive reference to her analysis of Virginia's death.

He searched for some time, he says, and then informed the police. In the official search, how thoroughly was the river dragged? If it was thought that the body had been washed out to sea, where did the draggers direct? The search? A tidal river, but not fast

flowing. How could her body have been wedged in some underwater debris? It would surely have required some very heavy rocks to have held it down, until it was found three weeks later floating like a decomposed Ophelia. Further, if Leonard was such a beloved figure in the village of Rodmell as he implies in that curious, tortuous account, "Virginia's Death", why would anyone even suspect that he had done away with his wife as Kenney states they did? In fact, how does she know there was such gossip? A statement like that is irresponsible if not backed up with solid evidence. Kenney's suspicions seem to have been aroused mainly because she finds the ending of the posthumously published *Between the Acts* so positive that she does not believe that Virginia could actually have intended suicide. What she does not consider is Leonard's brief mention of Virginia's death amid pages devoted to the persecution of the Jews and nostalgic memories of Cambridge friends, nor the questionable choice of photographs, not one of which is of Virginia Woolf. Above all, there is the curious decision about her own intense compassion when forced to drown some day-old puppies when he was a boy:

I put one of them in the bucket of water, and instantly an extraordinary, a terrible thing happened. This child, who was so young, began to sob desperately for its life, struggling, beating the water with its paws.

Leonard does not see any connection between this incident and his wife's tragedy; yet he manages to relate it to what generations of Gentiles have done to the Jews. There is no note of any tenderness in those suicide notes nor in Leonard's account of his relationship with Virginia. Most of the discussion of her and her work is concentrated on detailed charts of sales figures. True, there are some charts of her income for dinner and glorious holidays. Much as she longed to join Vanessa in Cassis in October 1936, Virginia had to refuse because "the fact is we are so unhappy apart that I cannot bear this. It is a failure, an impossible marriage, as I suddenly for the first time realised walking in the Square, reduces one to damnable servility." Does this necessarily indicate "touching devotion"? A woman with an unrequited love is hardly likely to share her husband's suicide, as related by Leonard, reveals some interesting glimpses into Leonard's mind, if not that of Susan Kenney's article as a "careful analysis". It is certainly that, but it is also brilliant and courageous. Kenney is not going to have any truck with sycophantic flattery, and her forthright argument is a welcome contrast to Nicolson's evasive reference to her analysis of Virginia's death.

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Death, Leonard says, was never far from Virginia's mind. He treats this obsession almost as a form of self-indulgence, whereas in nearly two thousand years of persecution in the ghettos of Europe the Jews have learnt that it is a full-time job to fight or evade life's inevitable evils, the wise men do not worry over the inevitable. He quotes unpleasant extracts from Virginia's letters, though to underline her total narcissistic self-absorption when confronted with the suffering of others:

March 24 (1941)
She had a nose like the Duke of Wellington, and green teeth and sharp prominent eyes. When we came in she was sitting perched on a three-cornered chair with knitting in her hands. An

arrow fastened her collar. And before five minutes had passed she had told us that two of her sons had been killed in the war. This one felt was to her credit. She taught dressmaking. Everything the room was red brown and glossy. Sitting there I tried to coin a few compliments. But they perished in the sea between us. And then there was nothing.

In the last volume of his autobiography Leonard says she had attempted suicide three times, whereas in *Downhill All the Way* he speaks of serious breakdowns after each book. Kenney adds that there were not only breakdowns after each book but suicide attempts after some of the many deaths that shadowed her life, and especially the deaths of her parents, and that during these nightmare periods she developed violent antipathy towards Leonard. Kenney finds it strange that it never occurred to him that she might profitably consult a psychoanalyst.

It seems strange now but it is a fact that Leonard Woolf, a man who read and published Freud's work and had friends who were practising psychoanalysts never in any of his published writings and as far as I know in letters or conversation showed any indication that he went beyond this simple analysis of Virginia Woolf's mental illness. He once told me that he felt the cause of her illness was clearly some sort of "mental defect", an elegant term but surely lacking in sympathy and understanding.

No one could dispute that Leonard had a problem on his hands, but clearly Kenney is disturbed by the manner in which he coped with it. He had two choices, she argues:

He could try to reason with Virginia and ask her to rest, to eat, to drink. *All the Way* Leonard asserts that he insisted on galley rather than page proofs so that she could still make revisions in the manuscript? Or any alterations

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remainders

By Eric Korn

Those of my readers who were not even shortlisted for the Booker should not despair: they have not exhausted all possible sources of subsidy. Here I have two timetables of the world-wide literary prizes (tenth edition) and Foreign Literary Prizes (Romance and Germanic Languages). They come from R. R. Bowker and Co at £16.50 each, a snip when you consider that each page could repay your investment many fold—unless of course you were unlucky enough to land the Premio Platero of the Real Academia Española, which was worth 1600 pesetas at the last count and would hardly keep you in calamaries, let alone clover. But here they all are, the P. C. Hooper's and the Count Dracula Society Awards, Doblozka Priset and Nils de Santa Lucia, the R. T. French Tastemaker award for influential cookbooks and the Wheatley Medal for an outstanding index.

These two indispensable guides list aims, conditions, composition of juries, recent winners, and—above all—addresses. There is some pluralistic stuff in the preface about how one might use the information he or she to trace, for example, the career of John Steinbeck from California State Literature Award in 1936 to Bestselling Paperback Award 1964, by way of Pulitzer and Stockholm; very useful, no doubt, but what your average reader wants is to be pointed in the direction of the crisp green folding stuff, the blue, mauve, fice, deign or spon-dulicks. What makes these prizes regrettable that the editors have decided to omit "prizes that are little known or only of local importance"; no doubt they are keeping to themselves, as who would not, but tips about obscure awards with lots of money and little competition, semi-private soup-tureaux like those wonderfully manipulable Oxbridge scholarships that used to be offered in the first instance to the younger sons of red-haired congregationalists from the Soke of Henricburgh and, failing that, to the first person to apply when I say go—and fancy that, another of my nephews seems to have won it.

I looked in vain for an award of five million escudos for an unpublished, indeed unwritten, literary project, restricted to elderly Kenish Town bookishers; there were instead lots of ambiguous awards for the writer who more or less has done most to bring about the millennium. There is the Cortina Ulisse ("culture ought to be a common instrument of civilization and not the privilege of the few") which goes to upstart titles like *Well Alas Besser Leben* and *We Too Can Prosper*, the Viraggio (culture, fraternity and peace) or the Lecomte de Nolly (special concern both for the spiritual life of the age and the defence of human dignity, now discontinued).

The Christopher Book Awards seem to want it all ways: they are judged "on the basis of their affirmation of the highest values of the human spirit, artistic and technical proficiency, and a significant degree of public acceptance." They have gone to the poet to such publicly accepted affirmers as Pauline Kerguelen and Malcolm Muggeridge (twice each), Herbert Hoover and Martin Scorsese, author of *The Spiritual Woman*, Trustee of the Future.

There are no awards, officially at least, for the writer who has done least to advance human dignity and understanding, or the author who has shown the most sustained contempt for his readers; though the French do have the Prix des Enfants Terribles which went in 1977 to Alain-Chédanne's *Shit Man*. I wonder what they called the English translation, and we are also given a list of the recipients of the city of Hamburg's awards (1933-43) in commemoration of the death (by alcoholic poisoning, according to William Shrier) of Dietrich Eckart, the Nazi poetaster. Less odious, but none the less unattractive, sounds the Unesco International Book Award, which in 1975 went to the USSR National Committee for International Book Year for its initiative in having 1972 proclaimed as International Book Year.

Much more sympathetic are the various consolation prizes, like the \$2,500 given to an English or American poet by the Friends of Russell Lohes (his very name a poem), "not as a prize but as a recognition of value, preferably of value not widely recognized." I suppose no one feels—or is—recognized sufficiently, but I would not have thought of Robert Graves as obscure in 1958, nor Larkin in 1974. Similarly, the Richard and Hilary Rosenthal Foundation rewards novels that have not achieved commercial success, though some of the medallists have surely succeeded since like *The Poorhouse Fair* or *The Cry of the Lo-49* or *The Assistant* (which also won the Booker gold medal on exchange rate of 1.8 pence to the dollar, but a Mann's for a Mann for a Mann). The one I would really like is a small replica of Charles Russell's "The Horse Wrangler" from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, but I'll settle for the D. H. Lawrence Fellowship, to spend eight weeks on the Lawrence Ranch near Taos, New Mexico. Please consider this as an application; I'll bring my own pyjamas for the heat.

Less invidious altogether are those prizes with really precise rubrics, like the David D. Lloyd Prize for the best book on the life of Harry Truman, or the Howard W. Hughes Award for popular books about heart disease, won by *The Living River* in 1969 and *The River of Life* in 1962, and my personal favourite—JoAnn Strichman and Jean Schenker's *How to Survive Your Husband's Heart Attack*, a book which might be very short indeed. (Entries of four words or less, on a postcard please, to the Academy of Sciences of the Chuvvish ASSK.)

There are, of course, innumerable regional awards, for writers from Freiburg and Oxford, South Carolina or North California. (There used to be one for Southern California too, but something strange seems to have happened to it. It was founded in 1972, awarded for the first time in 1975-6 to John Gilmore for *Blowout*, and then immediately discontinued.) Texas does pretty well, with a variety of goodies like the Jesse H. Jones Award and the Friends of the Dallas Public Library Award, which you must not think of as the Jesse Jones and the Friends of the Dallas Book Repository. There are all those ethnic awards: the Alex Haley Foundation African Roots Award, Jewish American, Greek American, the Godfather Award for the study of the Sicilian contribution to American culture. There are awards for the unknown (Broad Leaf Writers' Conference Endowment Fund has eighteen separate funds), rewards for the young and awards for the old (Marjorie Ponder White for continuing achievement and integrity), awards for the progressive and awards for the reactionary, like the Prix du Roman Populaire, founded as "an expression of popular reaction against surrealism and the psychological academic novel", and then given to upstart titles like *Well Alas Besser Leben* and *We Too Can Prosper*, the Viraggio (culture, fraternity and peace) or the Lecomte de Nolly (special concern both for the spiritual life of the age and the defence of human dignity, now discontinued).

In France, of course, there are enough awards for everybody to have a couple from the 100,000 francs of the sporadic Prix de la Nouvelle Vague to the fifty francs of the Goncourt and the two *louis* of the Prix Voltaire (the Prix Littéraire de 500,000 Francs is actually cashless). In addition to these there are the Prix Roger Nimier ("to maintain the permanence of a state of mind and a style"), the Quai des Orfèvres prize to encourage respect for the workings of the French police, and a best foreign book prize (not a translation prize), won rather belatedly in 1949 by James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, since when it has honoured more contemporary titles like *Le Seigneur des Anneaux* and *Entente* from C. S. Lewis, *Wounded Knee*, Tolkien, by the by, also won the Gandalf medal, which seems supererogatory, and shared the Benson Medal of the Royal Society of Literature with Rebecca West. Prime facie they wouldn't seem to have a lot in common, but no doubt were able to come to some amicable arrangement about wearing it alone weeks; more logically, Mary Shelley shared a Hugo with Mel Brooks and Gene Wilder for *Young Frankenstein*.

A few tips for the ambitious: the most bemuddled literary, judging from the index of the British-American volumes, are equal first Robert Lowell, Richard Wilbur and

Marianne Moore, so there may be some winning formula to be deduced; but poets win few pence, and it is perhaps better to be on the big one, which is the Premio Planeta, worth 8,000,000 pesetas unless this is a misprint. Be warned also that if you win the Gran Premio de Honor de la SADE all you get is a gold medallion of José Hernández (and perhaps I should just mention that SADE is the Sociedad Argentina De Escritores).

Literary prizes are wholly pernicious, encouraging competition and setting man against man, nowhere more clearly than in Germany where the Bundesrepublik offers 10,000 west-marks as the Thomas Mann prize, and the DDR 18,000-east-marks for the Heinrich Mann (making an exchange rate of 1.8 pence to the dollar, but a Mann's for a Mann for a Mann). The one I would really like is a small replica of Charles Russell's "The Horse Wrangler" from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, but I'll settle for the D. H. Lawrence Fellowship, to spend eight weeks on the Lawrence Ranch near Taos, New Mexico. Please consider this as an application; I'll bring my own pyjamas for the heat.

Apologies of nothing at all, a snake came to my water trough the other day. I was sitting at my typewriter staring at the roses in a deep dream of peace, when a small Indian child knocked at my door and asked if I knew I had a reptile in the garden. I explained condescendingly that he was not in the tropics now and should adjust his imagination accordingly, but he insisted I look and, sure enough, wrapped around Mrs Miniver, or it might have been Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, was an enormous green mottled ophidian. We exchanged apprehensive looks, while sundry ladies on the wall shouted useful advice along the lines of "I know, mister he gonna bite you Babylon white ass." While I was hesitating about whether to phone the Zoo and admit that I could not identify it, or call the police and say yes it was me that called them a month later had lost his key took a short cut through the back garden but I was only doing my duty as a concerned citizen and would they come and look at a giant tropical snake, the serpent lurched into the undergrowth and disappeared. He left me with an obscure sense that there was valuable literary material here if I could only put my finger on it, meanwhile, if anyone has mistaid a python, or a baby.

We passed the school where their lessons scarcely done: We passed the fields of grain.

We passed the setting sun.

Result of Competition No 39 Winner: Mrs M. Bruce, 17 Lumley Road, Chester. Answers: All very verdant—the authors' names, anyway.

Mr Rock rose with a groan. Crossing to the open bedroom window, he saw his torch on the floor. He picked it up, and the light reflected back on his face. He looked down. It will be a fine day, a fine day in the end, he decided.

He looked down. He clicked his light on. He found there was just enough light to see the wall, and which hung eighteen feet up and which did not descend to the ground, to make out Ted, his goose.

I should not have said that about Sicilians. Stereotyping has not had a good press recently—somehow a good and interesting Irish joke with the most elaborately apologetic preamble—but you might argue that you get to know people through a series of successively refined stereotypes. The racial prejudice is sometimes the embodiment, sometimes the antithesis of race hatred. In the *Cotswolds* in the 1940s we took jokes (quite unfunny rustic jokes, come to think of it) about the village of Ebrington, where they were all mad, and I remember, before a visit there, being worried about a straight face and not giggling at them because they were sensitive.

"Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, cover all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeds that of a normal bookcase." (From J. L. Borges, *The Library of Babel*, translated by James E. Irby.)

"Twenty shelves—five long shelves per side—cover all the sides except two; their height, which is that of each floor, scarcely exceeds that of an average librarian." (From J. L. Borges, *The Library of Babel*, translated by Anthony Kerrigan.)

"Twenty-five shelves, with five long shelves on each side, cover all the wall except one. They cover the ceiling and are about the height of a normal librarian." (From J. L. Borges, *The Library of Babel*, translated by G. R. Coulthard.)

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than Friday, November 21. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers to be opened, or failing that, the most nearly correct—in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

Entries should be addressed to the Editor, The Times Literary Supplement, P.O. Box 7, New Printing House Square, Gray's Inn Road, London WC1N 8EZ, and marked "Author, Author" on the envelope. The solution and result will appear in our issue of November 28.

1 If "compression is the first grace of style", you have it. Contrivance is a virtue as modesty is a virtue.

2 This is the soldier home from the war. These are the years and the walls and the door that shut on a boy that puts the floor to see if the world is round or flat.

This is a Jew in a newspaper that dances carefully down the ward, walking the plank of a coffin board with the crazy sailor that shut his mouth that tells the time of the wretched man that lies in the house of Bedlam.

3 We passed the school where their lessons scarcely done: We passed the fields of grain.

We passed the setting sun.

Result of Competition No 39 Winner: Mrs M. Bruce, 17 Lumley Road, Chester. Answers: All very verdant—the authors' names, anyway.

Mr Rock rose with a groan. Crossing to the open bedroom window, he saw his torch on the floor. He picked it up, and the light reflected back on his face. He looked down. It will be a fine day, a fine day in the end, he decided.

He looked down. He clicked his light on. He found there was just enough light to see the wall, and which hung eighteen feet up and which did not descend to the ground, to make out Ted, his goose.

I should not have said that about Sicilians. Stereotyping has not had a good press recently—somehow a good and interesting Irish joke with the most elaborately apologetic preamble—but you might argue that you get to know people through a series of successively refined stereotypes. The racial prejudice is sometimes the embodiment, sometimes the antithesis of race hatred. In the *Cotswolds* in the 1940s we took jokes (quite unfunny rustic jokes, come to think of it) about the village of Ebrington, where they were all mad, and I remember, before a visit there, being worried about a straight face and not giggling at them because they were sensitive.

"Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, cover all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeds that of a normal bookcase." (From J. L. Borges, *The Library of Babel*, translated by James E. Irby.)

"Twenty shelves—five long shelves per side—cover all the sides except two; their height, which is that of each floor, scarcely exceeds that of an average librarian." (From J. L. Borges, *The Library of Babel*, translated by Anthony Kerrigan.)

"Twenty-five shelves, with five long shelves on each side, cover all the wall except one. They cover the ceiling and are about the height of a normal librarian." (From J. L. Borges, *The Library of Babel*, translated by G. R. Coulthard.)

"Twenty-five shelves, with five long shelves on each side, cover all the wall except one. They cover the ceiling and are about the height of a normal librarian." (From J. L. Borges, *The Library of Babel*, translated by G. R. Coulthard.)

Author, Author,

about already, a dirty almost the same colour as the Persimmon cat, that kept her head duck, mist laden strings of Old and deaf, half blind, he said about himself, the air in his throat.

—Henry Green, *Conrad*

2 Sometimes I dream, And chat away the glass of time. Quit the stiff glare of the past, might have been expected to have developed an im-

And wear a gay impromptu Nor think nor speak with But lay on fancy's paint

Talk of unusual swiftness In maid of honour's And beauty borrowing And loving pair with And jewels pawned in And then redeemed

Of Kitty (aunt left in by grave presence a Perceived in hush and Like Will and May

And thus in modish aid of sugar, sweet From Matthew Green, the

3 It is the reproach of that they have too often history into a mere record butchery of men by the But was played a and in the real story of nations, and in that of English part is smaller than in any war which has profoundly English society and English ment is the Hundred Year with France, and of the results were simply of said little of the glories of the wrong and misery war prompted the verse of Longueville, and of the other hand, I have never from telling it length the of peace. I have restored place among the Englishmen the "Fœderic Englishmen the "Fœderic

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to the editor

The Amery Diaries

—Nik-picking is never very reasonable but unfortunately it is a habit among reviewers. When Koss, having been a victim of the past, might have been expected to have developed an im-

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Homer

—It gives me great pleasure to see S. R. West in his admirable review of Jasper Griffin's *Homer on Life and Death* (October 24), highly praises a book which seems to me the most important study of Homer that has appeared in many years, and that she appreciates the value, after a long period during which Homeric scholarship was preoccupied with oral technique, with archæology and with dubious history, of such an excellent study of the poetry of Homer.

I am surprised, however, that she has most reservations about the treatment of characterization, which seemed to me one of the best things of all. I do not feel that the different origins of different Homeric characters, even if we could speak of these with any degree of certainty, can make much difference to the poem in which the poet has presented them. Mrs West writes that "some have thought" that Patris was originally the chief Trojan warrior and was only later replaced by Hector; even if this rather dubious speculation could be accepted, the portrayal of both brothers is clear and consistent and the contrast between them firmly placed in the structure of the poem. I think Griffin has done well to insist that first characters in the poems can be different from each other; second, that they can be seen to intend things which they do not explicitly reveal as their intention; third, they can be complex, in ways which are rather different in the two poems.

—HUGH LOYD-JONES, Christ Church, Oxford, OX1 1DP.

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—HUGH LOYD-JONES, Christ Church, Oxford, OX1 1DP.

Monmouth, but it is out of my prisms what is the name of the other river; but 'tis all one, 'tis alike as my fingers is to fingers, and there is salmons in both.

—RICHARD BOSTON, Quarto, 20 Fitzroy Square, London W1.

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Czeslaw Milosz

Sir—George Schöfflin's account of the political complexities of Czeslaw Milosz's life and work (October 17) is useful and accurate, but almost fails to mention what is surely the main point: namely, that Milosz is a major poet and that it was for his poetry that he was awarded the Nobel Prize. What is more, his poetry is by no means exclusively political.

Two volumes of his verse are available in English translation. The more substantial, *Selected Poems* (Seabury Press: New York 1973), is difficult to come by over here and deserves an English edition. The other, *Bells in Winter*, published this year by the Carcanet Press, consists mainly of recent work.

Milosz is also a notable verse translator: of his own work, of Zbigniew Herbert's *Selected Poems*, and of various writers included in his *Post-War Polish Poetry*.

Many books written or edited by him have been published in our language but at present only one of them is still available in Britain. This is a situation which should now be rectified.

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'The Chances of Rhyme'

Sir—I am at a loss to know why Donald Westling (October 17) should think that my review of *The Chances of Rhyme* contains some crack about his salary—which I know nothing of and to which I had not given a thought. There seems to be nothing in my article which could possibly be construed as an allusion to the subject. Truth to tell, I am at a loss about several things in Professor Westling's letter, not least the stunning news that his book was "written in part as an attempt to qualify the modern Augustan position C. S. Hesson stands for."

Mal paese

By Patrick McCarthy

ALBERTO ARBASINO:
Un paese senza
353pp. Milan: Garzanti. L8500.

There is in Italy a genre of books that expounds the following proposition: "all things Italian have been, are and always will be in a state of utter chaos". A few years ago Giorgio Bocca wrote *L'Italia è malata*; now Alberto Arbasino experiments with the genre in *Un paese senza*.

For three hundred and fifty pages he reals off his list of foibles: Italy spends vast sums of money importing oil to feed a petrochemical industry that makes even more vast losses; the Italian Communist Party, which calls itself "traditional and revolutionary", denounces the Christian Democrats while demanding to govern with them. One could join in Arbasino's game and draw up one's own list: the Italian middle-classes pay high prices for bad French wines while ignoring their own cheaper and better ones; an Autonomia leader who was arrested while in possession of a guided missile, solemnly told the

police that he had found it on the motorway; Italy's highly paid soccer players have so little desire to play that they fix the matches. This last discovery was a blow even to the sceptical Italians. They knew their politicians were corrupt but it hurt them to learn that their star centre-forward, Paolo Rossi, was cheating.

Bocca had a special target: the Milanese upper-classes who were voting communist and calling for revolution while hiding their money in Swiss banks. Arbasino's special target is the New or Newer Left militant who participated in the Bologna demonstrations of 1977, reads *Lotta Continua*, has spent a few years at a university without ever attending classes much less obtaining a degree, is possibly on drugs, almost certainly unemployed and knows someone who knows someone who has become a terrorist. Such militants exasperate Arbasino because they exalt the factory-workers while staying as far as possible from the factory, and because they spend their lives in assemblies that discuss possible demonstrations to protest against ill-defined evils in distant countries which they cannot visit because they earn no money.

In such assemblies, claims Arbasino, concrete facts give way to

high-flown abstractions which are invariably decked out with quotations from the unfortunate Gramsci. Hours may be spent deciding whether disco music is right-wing or left. Further hours are consumed in the quest for a master: Mao and Castro have long since failed but perhaps Jacques Lacan or John Travolta can replace them.

Many of Arbasino's onslaughts are unjust, although this scarcely matters. One might argue that Italy fares well in export markets and that Milan has in recent years rivalled Paris as a fashion centre. One might argue, too, that the Newer Left is necessary because it is the expression, however distorted, of hundreds of thousands of young people to whom the economy offers nothing except permanent unemployment. But the "Italy-is-in-chaos" genre does not heed such cautious pedantry.

The real weakness of *Un paese senza* lies in the writing itself. Whereas Bocca merely described confusion, the more ambitious Arbasino seeks to render it by a ceaseless flood of words. His book is divided into short paragraphs full of lists, personifications, rhetorical questions and doggerel poems. But, although such fragmented rhetoric is supposed to mirror Italy's confusion, one grows weary of such pas-

sages as this: "Is not today's Italy... a medieval, Middle-Eastern cauldron full of gipsies and knaves, cannibals and thieves, a casbah which echoes with the miscellaneous rhapsodies of know-nothing rock and anarchical pop and where everyone talks passionately to himself and weeps over his existence?"

Readers of *L'Espresso* and *La Repubblica* are familiar with Arbasino's talent. In his articles he begins with a painting or a play and spins out a meditation on modern culture that stands on its own as a glittering moment of insight. But in *Un paese senza* these moments are repetitions because they are not bound together into a whole. Fragmentation of language does not in itself render the fragmentation of culture. There must be a logic or a personal vision that unites the fragments. If it is not to become a part of the chaos which is its subject. While rebuking Italians for their use of foreign words, Arbasino uses thousands himself and shows an ironic awareness of the confusion they cause. But now he is interested in what the Newer Left militant uses his quotations from Gramsci. *Un paese senza* drags on, satirizing conceptual art, Pope John-Paul II and skateboards. It could be longer still or else shorter, because it has no organic shape.

If Arbasino is so lavish with foreign words it is because his own words are too poor to express his proposition: "the Italians are more cultured than the Germans". Once more one must turn to the list of "less cultured" Americans and less cultured Russians, for he has more than the Swedes, Arabs, and for example, on the Italian does he really think that *Strozzini* is a better film than *Strawberry*? Surely *Padre* demonstrated that a child's clucking than a childhood of lyn. And is Enrico Berlinguer really worthy leader of the opposition? Surely *Padre* demonstrated that a child's clucking than a childhood of lyn.

Arbasino laments that "Italy take no interest whatever in what is going on in the world". This is unfair because we are so intensely interested in what Arbasino's attempts to do. We are interested in what he does in the Newer Left. We are interested in what he does in the Newer Left. We are interested in what he does in the Newer Left.

he uses of reason

John Coakley

NEWLETHWAITE:
Theology
Cambridge University Press.
Paperback, £2.95.
3104 3

NEWLANDS:
The Love of God
Collins, £3.50.
5527 2

These two books are Cambridge theologians' invitation to a new way of thinking about God. It is possible in a rough and ready way, to say that Newlands' *Theology of the Love of God*, which, while being different in genre (it is a work of systematic theology) shares Newlethwaite's contention that there is something radically central to Christian belief. Thus both books are critical of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, though Newlands is un-

derstanding that the Christian authors' difficulties are not their own but those of the culture. In fact, as what Newlands feels characterize the present theological climate more than anything else, and in his constant desire to anticipate criticism from all sides his writing often takes on a darting, vaguely paranoid style which makes his direction hard to follow. (At other times, it must be said, there are brilliant flashes of wit, but these are for any theologian, ancient or modern.) But the central contention of the book is that love, rather than faith and hope (which have both enjoyed vigour in recent years), is the central theological theme. Theological reflection is on God. The nature of that love as "self-giving, self-abandoning and self-affirming" is, supremely revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And "the incarnation is itself an inner revelation of creation, an opening up of a new dimension of love."

Newlands' commitment to Trinitarianism and his attraction to the paradoxes of a *theologia crucis* ("God is radically hidden in his presence"), etc. suggest special influence from Max Müller and Jung. In discussing Molinism Newlands is rightly critical of his metaphysical

philosophy. Newlethwaite next tackles the question of how to adjudicate between truth claims, and recommends the "cumulative case" of none of them individually. This is a commendable move, at least in principle, but demonstrating the super-

Interim ethics

Elizabeth Moberly

COLEMAN:
Attitudes to Homo-
sexuality
SPCK, £8.50.
2756 6

Attitudes to homosexuality have moved like a train, and it is no longer enough to discuss the question in depth. Peter Coleman's *Attitudes to Homosexuality*, the latest contribution to the series, is the most comprehensive and up-to-date book on the subject. It is a book for all concerned with the basis and development of attitudes. Peter Coleman, a priest and a theologian, is a member of the Anglican working-party on homosexuality, and his book is a product of that working-party. It is a book for all concerned with the basis and development of attitudes.

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lives. Thus far the traditional Christian viewpoint goes unquestioned. At this point Coleman undertakes to trace the contemporary diversification in Christian attitudes, from the early 1950s onwards, and he concludes with a call for an interim ethic, Coleman—like the Church of England working-party as a whole—is clearly disatisfied with a simplistic statement of the traditional ethic, but at the same time hesitates to move definitively towards a more radical position.

The inadequacy of the traditional ethic is stated to lie in the need to take seriously the data now available about human sexuality. Thus, Coleman professes his detailed theological survey with some comments on the development of medical and psychological views. This section is disappointing. Both here and in his concluding remarks, Coleman underestimates the contemporary prevalence of the psychodynamic understanding of homosexuality. The suggestion that "no present day analytical psychologist would conduct his professional work exactly in the terms set out by Freud" is correct, if only because the term "analytical psychologist" is normally reserved for followers of Jung. Terminological quibbles apart, there are more major points to be taken into account. The importance attached to interpersonal factors has not been wanted. Likewise, it is inaccurate to suggest that the understanding of homosexuality as a state of incomplete development is merely an "early psychological view", with the implication that such an evaluation has now been superseded. Above all, the psychological evidence as a whole is seen as both varied and inconclusive, and this hardly suggests an adequate basis for a considered change in the Christian evaluation of homosexuality.

A particular example of this pertains to therapeutic difficulties. The uncertainty of treatment procedures, and the reluctance of many homosexuals to seek treatment, are presented as major points, and are given as a basis for a more liberalized view of increasing liberalization.

naively: how exactly does God himself suffer abandonment on the cross, and how is he changed by this? Against Newlands, though, one might want to utter a *quango*. It is not clear that he offers any further explanation, though he certainly demands such of others. He himself concludes: "How God may take death overcome into his own experience... we shall never be able to say."

Hebblethwaite and Newlands share not only doctrinal emphases, but also a firm commitment to rational argumentation in theology (Newlands too approves of "cumulative cases"), a desire to avoid special pleading, an unwavering insistence on the application of correspondence theory of truth in theological claims, and an acute appreciation of the importance of the historical in Christian faith. In all this the influence of their teacher, Donald MacKinnon, former Norris-Hulse Professor at Cambridge, is strongly felt. Yet there are also gaps.

Doubts about appeals to experience, and an excessive emphasis on the cerebral side of religion, lead Hebblethwaite to demote the study of liturgy and ritual to a relatively unimportant position, and to understand "myth" as doing nothing more than express a doctrinal proposition in "dramatic" or "pictorial" form. Perhaps similar pressures cause Newlands (ostensibly more positive towards experience as a theological criterion, but distrusting "smoke-screens of piety and liturgy") to mention prayer only twice in the course of his book, and then only fleetingly—surely a strange omission in a work devoted to the love of God. Certainly to Hebblethwaite one would want to counter that the wholly admirable insistence that theological debate be clear and rational is one thing, but the tendency to restrict the inputs, or raw material, on which that debate is based to the rationally comprehensible is quite another. But then such strengths and omissions may well be explained by the particular tradition of theological teaching at Cambridge, a tradition still primarily centred on philosophical and biblical study, a tradition which has produced a few great studies, certainly, but arguably less rich in scope.

The logic of this seems doubtful, and the call for a revised ethical judgment should not be allowed to rest on such tenuous foundations. The variety of data, and a measure of therapeutic pessimism, can only suggest the need for a deeper and more detailed grappling with psychological evidence and principles.

The recent diversification of Christian thought is well documented, as is Coleman's whole survey of Christian attitudes. Three views are discussed—the conservative and the radical—and it is to the author's credit that his presentation of each position seems fair and unprejudiced. His survey takes the reader up to 1979, in which year Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Methodists were actively involved in debating the homosexual question. Coleman refers to these as "three reconciling reports".

However, to be criticized by conservatives and radicals alike is not itself proof of having reached the right *via media*. In this connection, it is surprising that Coleman refers only briefly to the distinction between the homosexual condition and homosexual activity, and dismisses it as irrelevant. In a study of Christian attitudes this is a significant oversight, which can only complicate the question of re-evaluation. Hostility to interpersonal contact should certainly have no place in the Christian fellowship. This must be emphasized. But to press for the acceptance of homosexual activity is quite another matter, and the two are by no means equivalent concerns.

Coleman's own tentative liberalization is clearly linked with a profound sense of pastoral concern. This concern has led him to enter the debate publicly, and he will doubtless receive much criticism as a result. However, it should be made clear that his chief purpose in writing has been fulfilled. As a history of Christian attitudes to homosexuality, Coleman's book is a magnificent study and deserves the widest possible audience.

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